

CLEAN HANDS & DIRTY LATRINES

Matthew 15:1-20

I. AN HONORED DELEGATION IS SENT FROM JERUSALEM TO TALK WITH JESUS (Matt.15:1)

A. Matthew 15:1-8 deals with the *honoring* of authority.

1. Authority/official and presumable *honored* delegation is sent from Jerusalem (v.1)
2. Tradition of the **elders** [authority and honor of our forefathers] (v.2)
3. **Honoring** the commandment of God the Father by honoring parental authority (vv.3-6)
4. **Honoring** God with our lips and heart (v.8; Isaiah 29:13)

B. It probably was a great “*honor*” for Jesus to be visited from some scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem. Word has gotten around to the upper echelons of the powers that be in Jerusalem. They have heard of Jesus feeding the 5,000; His signs, wonders, miracles, and teaching. If Jesus wants His Kingdom program to go forward, now is the big chance for Jesus to break into the big leagues!

C. Jesus offends the “*honored*” delegation of religious leaders from Jerusalem!

1. Jesus condemns them for transgressing the commandment of God for the sake of their tradition (v.3)
2. Jesus condemns them for invalidating the 5th Commandment! (vv.4-6)
3. Jesus calls them hypocrites! (v.7)
4. Jesus says that their hearts are far from God; meaning that the very core of their being is impure (v.8; Isaiah 29:13)
5. Jesus says they worship God in vain! (v.9)
6. Jesus says that their teaching isn’t God’s, but the doctrine of men! (v.9)

“and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, **being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.**”
(Galatians 1:14)

D. It probably took days for the religious leaders to travel from Jerusalem to

Jesus, and yet the interview probably doesn’t last more than a minute! Jesus sends them away with a *dishonorable* discharge.

E. The disciples were dumbfounded! They thought that Jesus had just blown a big opportunity for the advancement of the Kingdom. How could the Kingdom come if they weren’t “in” with the political and religious leaders of Jerusalem? (v.12)

F. As Christians we should build bridges with non-Christians for the purpose of the Gospel. But with false teachers, it is a different matter (e.g. Ravi Zacharias, Richard Mouw, Gordon B. Hinckley and the Mormon cult; cf. Revelation 2-3).

II. THE SPARK WHICH INITIATED THE FIRE THAT BURNED THE BRIDGE TO JERUSALEM WAS THE QUESTION POSED TO JESUS: “WHY DO YOUR DISCIPLES BREAK THE TRADITION OF THE ELDERS? FOR THEY DO NOT WASH THEIR HANDS WHEN THEY EAT BREAD” (Matt.15:2)

A. Jesus has been warning all along about the unrighteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and now to begin questioning Jesus about breaking their manmade traditions?! Who were they to be worried about the cleanness of their *fingers* when they had seen Jesus casting out demons by the *finger* of God and yet accused Jesus of doing signs by the unclean power of Beelzebul? (Matt.12:22-37; cf. Matt.16:6)

B. The scribes and Pharisees were more concerned about the tradition of the elders than they were about the welfare of their parents! Jesus condemns them for not applying the command of God to the needs of parents (remember that there were no retirement plans or social security in Jesus’ day and so the elderly were often poor and needy; especially if their children didn’t support them) (cf. Ex.20:12//Dt.5:16; Ex.21:17; Lev.20:9).

Matthew 15:4
“For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’

Matthew 15:5
“But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,”

III. JESUS DOES NOT DIRECTLY ANSWER THE QUESTION ABOUT EATING WITH UNWASHED HANDS UNTIL VERSE 11.

A. Jesus' break with the tradition of the elders was to illustrate that true cleanness is a matter of the HEART and not the hands (vv.8,18).

B. We shouldn't miss the humor of Jesus' explanation! If your hands are so clean when you eat, then why is the latrine so dirty? (v.17; cf. Deut.23:12-14)

HEART - the control center of a person (well spring of life). The heart determines the emotions, thoughts, will, and a person's relationship to God. Because the heart is the control center of a person, it reveals their true nature (Prov.27:19; Matthew 12:33-35).

C. Jesus portrays the wickedness of man's heart as being dirtier than a latrine! (v.17; cf. Genesis 6:5 with 8:21 – not even the Flood could cleanse the heart of man!; Leviticus 11-16; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9-20)

D. In some homes, the dirtiest room isn't the bathroom. For some it is the entertainment center or the computer room. The only way you can cleanse the filth of your heart and stand clean and pure in the sight of a holy God is by believing in Jesus and obeying His commands (Deut.30:6-10; Jeremiah 31:33; **Ezekiel 36:25-27**; cf. Gal.5:16; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 4:21).

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation. Synod of Dort 3/4: Article 3

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

NOTE: The tradition of the elders which taught Jews to “wash their hands when they eat bread” was not rooted in Scripture. Jesus condemned the religious leaders for not applying the fifth commandment mercifully and compassionately. The feeding of the four thousand in Matt.15:32-39 substantiates Jesus' authoritative teaching about bread and cleanness.

QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH DISCUSSION & MEDITATION:

Take what you have learned this morning and make it into a prayer. Do you realize just how unclean your heart is apart from faith in Jesus? Have you trusted in Him for the forgiveness of your sins?

What is the irony between Herodias' daughter asking for the head of John (Mt.14:8-11) and the failure of the Pharisees to honor their father and mother (Mt.15:4-6)?

Explain the setting of the delegation sent from Jerusalem. Why is it so striking that Jesus burns His bridges with the religious and political leaders sent?

In what ways does the church today exchange the commandments of God for the traditions of men? Have you done this in your life?

Why did Jesus' disciples break with the tradition of the elders and not wash before eating? Were all the traditions of the elders wrong?

Explain the humor of “Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is thrown out into the latrine?”

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for not applying the 5th Commandment to their own situation and to the needs of parents (Matthew 15:4 with Ex.20:12//Dt.5:16; Ex.21:17; Lev.20:9). There are no specific Old Testament “commandments” that states that children *must* financially take care of their needy and aged parents. Nor was there a specific *prohibition* against Corban. But the doctrines and precepts of the scribes and Pharisees had undermined the “soul of the law.” They had failed to apply the law according to the weighty principles of love, mercy and compassion (cf. Matthew 9:13; 12:7).

Jesus assumed that the *application* of the 5th Commandment prohibited Corban and that it required helping needy parents. Jesus expected the teachers of His day to apply the Law as Paul later did in 1 Timothy 5:7,8. Right application of the Law is simply an outworking of what the Westminster divines called “good and necessary consequence” (I:6) or the first century exegetical principle known as *qal vahomer*. *Qal vahomer* is Hebrew for “light and heavy.” This principle teaches that what is true or applicable in a “light” (or less important) instance is surely true or applicable in a “heavy” (or more important) instance.